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## THE PECULIAR FUNCTIONS OF THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL: THEIR RELATIVE IMPORTANCE

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This is far from the first appearance in educational literature of material purporting to deal with the special purposes of the junior high school. It has even been preceded by writings which, like this one, bear upon the relative importance of certain "factors" or "items" that have come to be associated with the new institution, a relative importance arrived at by compounding the judgments of a number of educational workers. Justification for adding to the literature of this sort is to be found in the fact that heretofore the "factors" or "items" have included a hopeless confusion of functions and features. In other words, earlier presentations have had the defect of failing to distinguish between the special purposes of the reorganization under consideration and the administrative devices and changes by means of which these purposes are to be achieved. The writer is convinced that progress toward genuine reform will be slow indeed until the distinction between purpose and means is clear in the minds of those responsible for the reorganization and that many of the quasi- and pseudo-reorganizations so far effected are to be charged to the current confusion to which reference has just been made. The materials in the following pages deal with peculiar functions only, not with a mixture of functions and features.

*The peculiar functions.*—The distinctive purposes of the junior high school included in this study are those proposed elsewhere<sup>1</sup> by the writer as a tentative working list of peculiar functions by which to test the organization of the junior high school. This list was arrived at (1) by canvassing a large amount of educational literature dealing with the junior high school and (2) by selecting

<sup>1</sup> L. V. Koos, *The Junior High School* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), chap. ii, "The Peculiar Functions of the Junior High School."

from the functions found in this way, through the scrutiny of such scientific and other considerations as it was possible to muster for this purpose, those which seemed to have the largest measure of educational justification. These peculiar functions are as follows:

1. Realizing a democratic school system through
  - a) Retention of pupils
  - b) Economy of time
  - c) Recognition of individual differences
  - d) Exploration for guidance
  - e) Vocational education
2. Recognizing the nature of the child
3. Providing the conditions for better teaching
4. Securing superior scholarship
5. Improving the disciplinary situation and socializing opportunities

Briefly characterized, realizing a democratic school system means here the equalization of educational opportunities. This is to be accomplished through performing the sub-functions *a*, *b*, *c*, *d* and *e*. That is to say, in order to equalize educational opportunities many pupils who are eliminated in the traditional plan must be induced, through the educational reorganization effected by the junior high school, to extend their educational careers over a longer period; time must be economized for all, so that a larger proportion of the total population may make contact with the materials of a more functional education than is provided by the extension and repetition of the common branches; the striking variation in capacity, ability, interest, and need must be taken account of; before this may be done we must canvass for these differences and assist the child in exploring on his own account; and we must provide the beginnings of vocational education for the over-age pupils and for others who are destined to drop out early. The extent of vocational education presumed by this sub-function is that which would be a by-product of performing adequately the sub-function immediately preceding, exploration for guidance and the additional opportunity of specialized training, shown to be necessary by a survey of the proportion of over-age children eliminated during the later elementary years, and the occupations into which they tend to go or might be trained to enter. In some communities this would mean no occupational training beyond that

necessary for exploration. In others, some beginning of real training for specialization might be called for, especially in the eighth and ninth grades.

The particular phases of child nature which were kept in mind by the persons passing judgment as the characteristics which should be recognized in reorganization, are those of adolescence, more especially the changes in physical constitution and the "dawn of the social consciousness." The significance of the expression "providing the conditions of better teaching" is sufficiently apparent without pointing out that those who uphold it as an advantage refer to the hopelessness of providing effective teaching in the seventh and eighth grades under conditions fixed by the traditional organization. "Securing better scholarship" was understood to signify securing a better scholastic response than is obtained in the unreorganized school. The last function in the list assumes the unsatisfactory character of the disciplinary situation in the typical upper-grade classroom, and looks to the junior high school to improve this and in many ways to enhance the socializing forces of our educational system.

*The judges.*—Those who balloted on the peculiar functions as listed and described above were one hundred and thirty members of classes dealing with the problems of the junior high school conducted by the writer during summer sessions at the University of Washington (1919), the University of Minnesota (1920), and the University of Chicago (1920). These students were educational workers of experience, including teachers, principals, and superintendents, many of whom are directly in charge of junior high schools. With few exceptions they were graduate students or advanced undergraduates, most of them of the former classification. The balloting was postponed in every class until after the justifiability of all the functions, including many not mentioned above, had been canvassed with some care, through readings and class discussion which consumed approximately the first half of the course. Discussion at no point gave consideration directly to the relative importance of these functions, although doubtless it could hardly avoid making some of them appear to the students to be more important than others. The readings assigned, selected as

far as possible from the more nearly scientific materials, not from those setting forth opinion merely, represented a wide variety of contributors to the literature on the junior high school.

*The method of balloting.*—The task of balloting was the very simple one of ranking the peculiar functions in the order of the desirability or necessity of their performance in the grades of the junior high school. The judges were asked to submit two such rankings. The first concerned the five major functions in the foregoing list. In this instance, the judges were requested to take for granted that the first function, realizing a democratic school system, obtains meaning from the five sub-functions and therefore comprehends them. The second method of balloting numbered sub-functions *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, and *e* and functions 2, 3, 4, and 5—nine functions in all—in the order of their importance in the junior high school.

*The results of the ranking.*—The results of the balloting are presented in Tables I and II. The method of assembling these tables may be set forth by reference to Table I: 96 of the total of 130 judges assigned rank 1 to the first peculiar function, realizing a democratic school system; 24, rank 2; 5, rank 3; 2, rank 4; and 3, rank 5. The “Total of Ranks” in the last column but one—182 in the case of this function—is obtained by multiplying each rank by the number of times it was assigned and adding these products. Thus, the sum of  $1 \times 96$ ,  $2 \times 24$ ,  $3 \times 5$ ,  $4 \times 2$ , and  $5 \times 3$  is 182. A small total of ranks indicates a higher place in the estimation of the group of judges than does a large total. The “Average Rank” in the last column is merely the quotient obtained by dividing the total of ranks by the number of judges, 130.

A glance at the distribution of ranks assigned in the first table will show that, although there is only one function to which all ranks are not assigned, there is a notable tendency toward agreement in rank in the instances of three of the five functions, viz., 1, 2, and 4. The first function received 96 first ranks and 24 seconds, with few assigning to it a rank below the second. The second function was assigned second rank by 71 judges, and first and third ranks by much smaller numbers of judges. The fourth function is given fifth rank by 70 judges and fourth by 45, few

giving it a higher place than fourth. There is less agreement as to the two remaining functions, 3 and 5, disagreement being more marked for the former. As is to be anticipated from these distribu-

TABLE I

RANK ASSIGNED BY 130 JUDGES TO EACH OF FIVE PECULIAR FUNCTIONS OF THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL (FIRST BALLOTING)

Peculiar Functions	Number of Judges Assigning Rank					Total of Ranks	Average Rank
	1	2	3	4	5		
1. Realizing a democratic school system.....	96	24	5	2	3	182	1.40
2. Recognizing the nature of the child.....	28	71	21	6	4	277	2.13
3. Providing the conditions for better teaching.....	5	22	39	44	20	442	3.40
4. Securing superior scholarship.....	.....	2	13	45	70	573	4.41
5. Improving the disciplinary situation and socializing opportunities.....	1	11	52	33	33	476	3.66

TABLE II

RANK ASSIGNED BY 124\* JUDGES TO EACH OF NINE PECULIAR FUNCTIONS OF THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL (SECOND BALLOTING)

Peculiar Functions	Number of Judges Assigning Rank									Total of Ranks	Average Rank
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
a) Retention of pupils.....	55	10	18	5	7	9	4	9	7	401	3.23
b) Economy of time.....	8	19	10	27	16	18	11	7	8	577	4.65
c) Recognition of individual differences.....	20	41	34	16	9	3	1	...	...	338	2.73
d) Exploration for guidance.....	2	7	21	25	22	19	15	10	3	615	4.96
e) Vocational education.....	...	2	6	11	17	20	22	22	24	817	6.59
2. Recognizing the nature of the child.....	33	32	18	11	11	9	4	2	4	384	3.10
3. Providing the conditions for better teaching.....	5	10	8	14	9	12	31	24	11	730	5.89
4. Securing superior scholarship.....	...	1	1	7	10	14	17	27	47	925	7.46
5. Improving the disciplinary situation and socializing opportunities.....	1	3	8	8	23	20	19	23	19	786	6.34

\*Six of the 130 judges whose rankings were assembled in Table I failed to present usable ballots for the second ranking.

tions, the smallest of the total of ranks falls to function 1, and the next smallest to function 2. Functions 3 and 5 have totals approximately equal, while the total for function 4 falls considerably

below these. The average ranks show the same relationships as already indicated.

If these five functions are renumbered in the order of importance assigned to them by the compounded judgment of these 130 students of the junior high-school problem, the sole rearrangement necessary is interchanging functions 4 and 5. In the reorganization to be effected according to this judgment the first two functions, realizing a democratic school system and recognizing the nature of the child at adolescence, would be made the most influential; the next two, providing the conditions for better teaching and improving the disciplinary situation and socializing opportunities, would be somewhat less influential, but, as compared with each other, of almost equal importance; while the last, securing superior scholarship, because it is, as may be inferred, more in the nature of a result than an independent function, would be kept in mind least prominently.

When the number of functions which are ranked is increased by making the five subdivisions of function 1 shift for themselves in competition with the four remaining functions, the result, as shown in Table II, is much less uniformity of judgment than in the results just presented. There are certain modal judgments, to be sure, but they are not as marked nor do they obtain in as large a proportion of the number of different functions as in the balloting already discussed. As many as 55 judges assign rank 1 to retention of pupils; 41 assign rank 2 to recognition of individual differences; large numbers assign the first three ranks to recognizing the nature of the child at adolescence; and 47 give the lowest rank to securing superior scholarship. But there is great disparity as to the five remaining functions, with no marked modal distributions of the ranks assigned.

The totals of ranks in the last column but one show that the compounded judgment of the 124 persons places these functions in the following order of importance: (1) recognizing individual differences, (2) recognizing the nature of the child at adolescence, (3) retaining pupils, (4) economizing time, (5) exploring for guidance, (6) providing the conditions for better teaching, (7) improving the disciplinary situation and socializing opportunities, (8) pro-

viding the beginnings of vocational education, and (9) securing superior scholarship. These figures indicate also that the first three functions just listed are regarded as of greatest importance in reorganization and of approximately equal importance with each other; that the fourth and fifth come next and are regarded as of almost equal importance; that the next three follow close upon each other; and that the last one, as in the first balloting, is much below all others.

Here again, as in the first balloting, recognizing the nature of the child takes a high rank. Two of the sub-functions of function 1, which took a high rank in the first ballot, are among the most highly regarded in the group of nine functions. This preference explains in some part why function 1 was assigned such a prominent place in the first balloting.

The reader is doubtless aware of the danger of concluding that, if a function is given a relatively low ranking by the compounded judgment or by an individual, it is therefore unimportant. The method of balloting used in this study secures a judgment on *relative* importance only. Many of the judges especially mentioned the fact that low ranks assigned by them signified *less* importance, rather than unimportance. A fact somewhat related deserves mention: some judges gave a relatively low rank to certain categories because such functions would to a greater or less extent result from the performance of other functions, although their performance is to be regarded as essential in reorganization. This affected functions *a* and 4 more often than others.

An interesting comparison is provided in Table III. In the last column this table presents the new rank given to each of the nine peculiar functions by numbering them in the order of the average ranks shown in Table II; and in the last column but one the table indicates the rank as determined by the frequency of mention of each peculiar function in a wide range of educational literature dealing with the junior high school. The literature examined is that referred to elsewhere<sup>1</sup> by the writer and includes public-school documents (thirty in number), usually written by principals or superintendents, and articles and portions of books (twenty in

<sup>1</sup> Koos, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-19.



number) by "other educational leaders." Although the methods of arriving at the ranks compared have little in common, there is a notable similarity in the order of importance thus found. The ranks actually coincide in but a single instance, but for seven of the remaining functions there is a disagreement of but one (two cases) or two (five cases) steps. There is a very large disparity in the case of one function only, recognizing the nature of the child, the judges regarding it as second in importance, whereas frequency of mention in educational literature places it near the foot of the list.

TABLE III

COMPARISON OF RANKS ASSIGNED EACH OF NINE PECULIAR FUNCTIONS OF THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL BY A CANVASS OF EDUCATIONAL LITERATURE AND BY 124 JUDGES

PECULIAR FUNCTIONS	IN EDUCATIONAL LITERATURE		RANK BY JUDGES
	Frequency of mention	Rank Assigned from Frequency of Mention	
a) Retention of pupils.....	40	1	3
b) Economy of time.....	36	2	4
c) Recognition of individual differences.....	35	3	1
d) Exploration for guidance.....	27	6	5
e) Vocational education.....	26	7	8
2. Recognizing the nature of the child.....	22	8	2
3. Providing the conditions for better teaching..	31	4	6
4. Securing superior scholarship.....	13	9	9
5. Improving the disciplinary situation and socializing opportunities.....	28	5	7

*Conclusion.*—The relative importance of the distinctive purposes of the junior high school arrived at by the method here used cannot be regarded as final. An ultimate evaluation is not to be so easily attained. But such an evaluation as has been attempted here is far from being devoid of meaning for reform, especially since those who participated in the ranking were experienced educational workers, many of them having direct responsibilities in the junior high school, were graduate students or advanced undergraduates, most of them of the former classification; and all had, through extended reading of literature bearing on these functions

and through discussion during half the time of a course concerned with reorganization, placed themselves in a position to pass an informed judgment upon the relative importance of junior high-school functions. These compounded judgments are not the last word, but they are deserving of serious consideration by those concerned with the problems of reorganization in the grades concerned.